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## GEORGES CLÉMENTEAU.

BY L. ANDRIEUX.

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I MET Georges Clémenceau for the first time in 1860 at the Latin quarter in a newspaper office. Among the various contributors to the paper "*Le Travail*," the editor of which was Germain Casse, later on deputy of La Guadeloupe. I had at once noticed the young student: his convex and prominent forehead, the keen and penetrating gaze of his dark eyes under bushy and boldly pencilled eyebrows, his heavy mustache falling upon the ironical lips produced the impression of will, energy and intelligence.

Brought together by a common feeling of revolt against all oppressing powers, we were not long in forming a connection of good-fellowship; being both filled with the enthusiasm of the twentieth year, we poured it forth in vehement essays, published in the same little weekly papers of the *Rive gauche* during all these years of awakening and effervescence, when the youth of the various Faculties began to assault the *Empire*.

Clémenceau was always a hard worker; his medical studies and the philosophical researches which he added to them were strong enough an attraction to keep him from the political *cafés* where the marble tables were used as pulpits by the future orators of the republican party; he was more likely to be met either in the silent libraries or in the hospitals.

Our different courses soon parted us; I had left Paris when he maintained his thesis on "The generation of anatomical elements," in which he proclaimed his faith that through science might be discovered "the enigma of things," and opposed it to the scepticism of the positivist school.

During the long time he spent in the United States, where his experience of free institutions strengthened his hatred to per-

sonal power, I heard but little of Clémenceau except by the remarkable essays which he sent to the paper "*Le Temps*" on the economic and literary development of the great nation to the service of which it seemed then that he would give up his life.

He was, however, in Paris when the Empire was overthrown; being Mayor of Montmartre, and having been elected deputy of the Seine to the National Assembly, he was liable to the heaviest responsibilities during the insurrection of the 18th of March. Had it not been tried, through the treachery and hatred of parties, to involve him in the murder of Generals Clément Thomas and Lecomte? For whoever happens to know him, his energetic denials were unnecessary. Let it be enough to recall that Clémenceau, in the town hall of the eighteenth district, heard of this tragedy when it was already over. A man must have lived in a great city in insurrection time to realize how speedily and fatally happen the events whirled along by the torrent of excitable crowds. At about the same time, at Lyons, where I was *Procureur de la République*, I heard but too late, by the tardy warning of gun-reports, of the murder of Major Arnaud, and it never came to the thought of any of my enemies that I might have prevented it.

The members that made up the National Assembly and their evident desire to restore monarchy might have inclined Clémenceau to stand against the government of M. Thiers. But was not a freely elected Assembly the only legitimate power? Had not universal suffrage committed to it the trust of national sovereignty? Was not insurrection, with the enemy at hand, doomed beforehand to a repression in which the Republic might be destroyed? Hesitating between various feelings, Clémenceau remained on the side of duty; but he was one of the most active members of the "League for Paris Rights"; he took an important part in all the attempts at conciliation which, disowned on both sides with equal obstinacy, were looked upon at Versailles as the acts of an accomplice, and in Paris as treachery.

After four years spent in the Town Council of which he was elected President, Clémenceau was, in 1876, sitting in the Chamber of Deputies, where I met him. I had been sent there myself by the department of the Rhône at the same time that he was nominated by the constituents of the eighteenth district of Paris.

He was sitting at the extreme Left, near Lockroy and Georges

Périn. Bent on having their party respected, perfectly trained in pistol-shooting and fencing, ever ready to call out the parliamentary quarrels on another ground, these three deputies never heard any challenge from the Right without at once taking it up. Gambetta had nicknamed them "the three musketeers."

When, after a tribune incident, I fought with Paul de Casagnac my first Parliamentary duel, Clémenceau himself took me to the famous armorer Gastine Rennette, and gave me my first lesson in firing at the word of command.

The legislatures followed one another, and each of them brought new forces to the republican party. Decimated as it was by invalidations, losing more and more the confidence of the country, the Right was no more a danger to be feared by the new institutions. But at the same time as the Republic was getting strengthened, a new peril was arising from the very ranks of the republicans.

The same men who had signed the advanced programmes of the party, those who, by their words, had led on democracy to the hope of a better life under a system of justice and equality, seemed to forget their engagements and stop, satisfied in the enjoyment of the power they had conquered. The revolutionists of yesterday were preaching for patience; it was necessary, they said, to go slowly in order to get on safely; advisable to solve the questions each in turn; to take into account prejudices and inveterate habits, so as not to provoke a reaction. As there is no sudden bound in the scale of beings, so there must not be any in the evolution of political institutions. And upon these principles had been formed a fresh party, called after a nasty name—the *opportunisme*. Its members discussed willingly the opportunity of having "a policy grounded on business," and this saying attributed to the last minister of King Louis Philippe: "By all means, get rich!" seemed called to a new occasion.

Clémenceau took his stand against the opportunism; he wished for a republican Republic, with all its consequences, and to the policy of concession opposed intransigent principles.

Thence came his ceaseless struggles against the ministers who drew their inspiration from the new doctrine, and the downfall of cabinets in turn; thence, wounded interests and vanities, and hatred whose reprisals Clémenceau was to suffer later on.

The first question upon which the moderates and the extreme Left were obviously divided, was that of the amnesty. It took up several sittings in the month of May, 1876.

Standing up against the conclusions of the parliamentary commission, Clémenceau, for his maiden speech, came up to plead the cause of forgetting and forgiving in such refined and precise language, with such elevation of thought and dialectic power that he has since been among the foremost orators of his party.

He spoke of the *Commune* as a patriot who could hardly conceal from himself how criminal was the attempt against the legitimate representatives of the nation; he chimed in with the interruption of his friend Georges Périn, who had exclaimed: "Had we approved of the Commune, we would have fought in its ranks." But while disowning insurrection, he stated eloquently what circumstances might lessen the responsibility of the insurgents: the agonies of a siege, the anger of a town whose courage had been every day exasperated without any opportunity of being given vent to, the shame of capitulation, the meeting of an Assembly threatening for the Republic and for the rights of Paris; the metropolis deserted by a government given up to violent designs; the pitiless reprisals which were to constrain the incensed and despairing combatants to a merciless struggle.

I can still see Clémenceau standing in the tribune while he enlarged upon his argument in curt, simple sentences, unpretending and unaffected, without any bombastic and oratorical show, but accurate, neat and to the point. The want of experience in tribune speaking did perhaps bring too frequent pauses, and the voice happened to drop more than was necessary at the end of the sentences; but when interruptions would rouse the orator his ever-on-the-alert wit flashed out in quick, humorous and lashing replies. His thought, without losing any of its strength or perspicacity, gained in originality what it lost in rhetorical fustian. The time of forgiveness was to come only three years later; the motion on amnesty was rejected by 392 votes to 50.

However, the far-away expeditions in which Jules Ferry, against the will of the nation, involved the French policy, were for Clémenceau an opportunity for new oratorical successes. The partisans of these expeditions to-day pride themselves on their having succeeded, without too many complications, in extending our colonial possessions. In order to judge fairly of the oppo-

sition they met with, we must remember what was the situation of France after her late disasters, of what ceaseless danger she was threatened on her Eastern frontier and what mighty reasons she had, in her loneliness, to lose none of her forces for fanciful advantages. Has it been forgotten that the establishment of our protectorate over Tunis was the direct cause of that Triple Alliance whose weight has been so long and so heavy a burden on our foreign policy?

Clémenceau, moreover, brought forward in his argument lofty considerations of human solidarity, and his appeal could not be unheard of the nation which, proud of having, by its philosophers and revolutions, diffused throughout the world its ideas of right and justice, had just been yielding to main strength.

The events of the year 1888, by obliging the republicans to concentrate their efforts on the common defence, put an end to the opposition spirit of Clémenceau. An ambitious general, thinking less of his own honor or military duty than of the gratifications following on power, had listened with complacency to the flatteries and promises of the reactionary parties; availing himself, on the one hand, of the discomposition and despondency of an assembly divided into three nearly equal parts, where none but coalition majorities were possible, and on the other hand of the discontent of a country lured by vain promises and holding liberty accountable for its disappointments, General Boulanger, on a negative programme, had grouped and was leading to the onset from the parliamentary system the most numerous party, the party of malcontents.

Clémenceau, who had at first thought that he might use the popularity of Boulanger as a fighting instrument against opportunism, promptly separated from him, and when the alliances of the general had left no more doubts as to his designs, boldly denounced his suspicious programme.

Besides, for the late few months, the radical party had come into office, and if the political reforms were still only in contemplation, the reason of it was, before thinking of gathering the fruits, to prevent the uprooting of the tree.

The 12th of July sitting in the Chamber of Deputies was especially stormy. General Boulanger, deputy of the North department, had made a motion for the Chamber to be dissolved

and had enlarged upon it in words offensive to his colleagues. The Prime Minister, Charles Floquet, replied by a cutting speech which met with much applause on the Left, and Boulanger retorted by giving the lie to him, in the most insulting form. Floquet at once intrusted two of his friends, Georges Clémenceau and Georges Périn, with the charge of demanding from the General reparation by a duel. Boulanger put them in communication with MM. Laisant and Le Hérissé, and the encounter took place on the following morning; the opponents were to fight with swords.

The want of experience of both opponents made things equal. Scarcely had Clémenceau, who managed the fight, joined the points of the swords and pronounced the traditional words: "*Partez, Messieurs!*" than General Boulanger, hand low and up-lifted point, charged right down upon his opponent, in double step, as at the point of the bayonet. Floquet stepped backwards on and on, at the same speed, arm and sword extended, till he got to the wall. Boulanger, still rushing on, fell, his throat upon the sword of his opponent, who was himself slightly wounded.

The wound of the General seemed most serious, and during a few hours his friends had to fear that it might imperil the destiny of boulangism.

That very same day had taken place on the *Place du Carrousel* the inauguration of a monument in memory of Gambetta. Lost in the crowd, I was present at the ceremony and could see, on the first rank of the official tribune, Charles Floquet who, surrounded by many friends, was receiving the congratulations of the senators and deputies. I could not hear his words, but I saw his gestures, now straight and now rounded, which meant, as far as I was able to understand his mimicking: "*Coutre de quarte! . . . Coutre de tierce! . . . Septime enveloppée . . . Coup droit!*"

Clémenceau was listening with a discreetly sceptical look; as to Floquet, he was convinced that his fencing had just jugulated Cæsarism.

What followed is well known: how Boulanger fled away to Belgium, then to England, his trial brought before the *Haute-Cour*, and the final downfall of an unprincipled coalition which ended in a romantic adventure.

This victory was mostly due to Clémenceau. Those who had

been defeated had no doubt about it, and when the electoral struggle of August 20th, 1893, came, their rancor, added to the ill-will of the opportunists, caused him to fail in the department of Var, which he was then representing in the Chamber.

Excluded from Parliament, Clémenceau was in no way dispirited. If he could not speak, he could write. He became the chief contributor of the paper "*La Justice*," of which he had only been hitherto the inspirer and the political leader. But his own paper was not enough for his active mind. He wrote, besides, remarkable articles for the "*Dépêche de Toulouse*," the "*Journal*," the "*Figaro*" and the "*Echo de Paris*," published two books on sociology, "*Le grand Pan*" and the "*La Mêlée sociale*," a novel "*Les plus forts*," and had a philosophical play, "*Le Voile du bonheur*," acted at the Renaissance theatre.

The Dreyfus affair arises. The Scheurer-Kestner papers, the acquitment of Esterhazy, the letter of Zola, the trial of Rennes, stir up and divide public opinion. Clémenceau is the editor of "*L'Aurore*," the chief organ in the revision campaign.

In his press dissertations, the editor of "*La Justice*," and "*L'Aurore*" was in the habit of taking up the most trifling fact among the miscellaneous news and to rise up from it to general ideas which he took delight in expounding. The Dreyfus *affaire* appeared to him a favorable opportunity for giving vent to his favorite arguments, and I hope I am not wandering from the path of truth when I say that the revision of the Dreyfus trial was for the brilliant polemist more a pretext than an object. Is not the atmosphere of indifference and forgetfulness which every day grows thicker around the rehabilitated convict a proof that the public, too, at least in France, was taking less interest in Dreyfus himself than in the political quarrels of his opponents and partisans?

Outside the Parliament, Clémenceau went on exercising over his party an influence which often proved preponderating. "I am voting for Loubet," he wrote on the day following the death of Felix Faure, and this mere title of a newspaper article was as a watchword for the majority of the Congress. Elected president of the Republic, M. Loubet acted according to the law of his origin; but the very moderation of his ideas, by contributing to make radicalism accepted more easily, explained Clémenceau's perspicacity.



In 1902, after ten years of exclusion, the senatorial constituents gave Clémenceau back to the Parliament. There, he supports Waldeck-Rousseau, M. Combes, M. Rouvier who, perhaps reluctantly, perseveres in the policy of his predecessor. But Clémenceau is, so to speak, in the margin of the majority; both by his speeches and votes, he asserts his independence and does not spare his criticisms of all measures he disapproves of. He seems to be divided between freedom which he means to remain faithful to, and the ministerial majority to which he is unable to give the slip while the separation of Church and State is being discussed.

"I do not bring my help to *M. le Président du Conseil*," did he say in his speech in the Senate on October 30th, 1902, for he does not need it; I will presently by my vote take place in the ranks of this republican majority which, to the counter-revolution of the Roman Church whose formula is the syllabus, opposes the spirit of the French revolution such as it is expressed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man." And having thus proclaimed his faithfulness to his party, he goes on to make a profession of liberalism which must be noted as one of the most prominent features in his political career.

"I think," he said, "that the duty of the republican party is to look with indifference upon the violent passions which are sometimes raging against it, and that we must honestly and peacefully try and know whatever amount of truth and justice there may be, even in the most insulting claims of our opponents. This is, at least, my own turn of mind. I say that to-day it is for me a cause of great anxiety to know what may be rightful in the complaints of our opponents, and I think that the superior interest of the Republic demands that justice be done. I think that the History of the Revolution shows that whenever violence has been used by the liberals it has always ended by turning round upon liberty."

And further on: "Now the power is yours, now that you hold in your hands the governmental authority, will you indeed become afraid of liberty? It shall not be. And were it to be, I would not stand with you. . . . Gentlemen, as a final argument, *M. le Président du Conseil* has said: 'We have the power and we have the right.' He has certainly never heard that he was to use power otherwise than for the service of right. As to me, I will speak plainly, and without reserve: were there to be any conflict

between Republic and liberty, the Republic would certainly be wrong and I would decide in favor of reason."

Close upon the late legislative elections, when the Rouvier Cabinet had to leave, M. Armand Fallières had already succeeded M. Loubet in the first magistracy of the Republic.

No likeness, either moral or physical, is to be found between M. Fallières and M. Clémenceau. I could try, in a more lengthy way, to bring out the contrast between the homely virtues, the quiet disposition, the refined and ingenious mind, though rather slow in its flight, of the President of the Republic and the fiery, independent, energetic and impulsive nature of the Var senator. However, as if the same attraction laws applied equally to human and inanimate bodies, these two men, so different from one another, feel a deep sympathy for each other.

The President was wise enough to resist his personal feelings, and he asked M. Sarrien to constitute a Cabinet. Commended to the choice of the President by his long experience and by the confidence the majority had in him, M. Sarrien secured the co-operation of M. Clémenceau, who assumed the Home Department.

It must be understood that official candidatures are far from being in the republican habits; yet the Home Secretaries are nevertheless held responsible for their party's failures; that is the reason why the victory of the republican candidates in the elections of last May strengthened the public trust in Clémenceau.

During the parliamentary vacation, while his colleagues were either keeping silent or uttering words without any echo or authority, the oratorical successes of the Home Secretary, both in the Var and in Vendée, increased his importance in the opinion of his party and were carrying him on, in the most natural way, to the Presidency of the Cabinet, when, on account of his health, or perhaps because he had the feeling of a new situation coming on, M. Sarrien decided upon retiring from office.

The new Cabinet was formed with the quick decision usual to Clémenceau. Criticised by some, praised by others, the choices he made were to none a surprise. I fancy that he was induced to appoint M. Viviani to the Labor Department through the wish of disarming the collectivists before fighting with them and of beginning the necessary struggle against them without endan-

gering too much the equilibrium of his Cabinet in the Parliament. As to the preferment of General Picquart to the War Department, I think I can explain it by the fact that this officer, in his efforts to drive back the surging flood of antimilitarism, and to obtain from the Chambers sacrifices necessary to the strength of our army, would be greeted by the majority with special favor. Satisfaction in the matter of individuals is much to be appreciated by assemblies; it moves them to action. There is nothing like a radical minister for making a moderate policy.

The new ministry is just now struggling hard with the difficulties arising from the application of the law on the separation of Church and State. They have no doubt been handled with less professional authority and not so thorough a knowledge of ecclesiastical hierarchy than might have been expected from M. Combes, but with a more heartfelt wish not to infringe in any way upon the rights of conscience and the free exercise of worship. The resistance shown by the Vatican with regard to the creation of *associations cultuelles* for the devolution of Church property has been for the promoters of the law a first disappointment which has been most painfully shared by prominent men among the Catholics. At the risk of losing the confidence of the majority and with conciliating intentions that it would be unfair to disregard, the ministry has proposed for the exercise of worship the common law used for public meetings, with the only obligation of making an annual declaration, the interest of which would not be easily perceived if its object was not to give an apparent satisfaction to the demands of the law. Considering himself as the sole judge of what his conscience, his faith, the constitution of the Church and the interests in his keeping dictate, the Pope has rejected the formalities of the declaration as he had already forbidden the creation of *associations cultuelles* and as he has just been repelling a new attempt to transactional legislation. He goes on his way, his eyes lifted up to heaven, confident in the words of Christ, fearless of earthly abysses. Rome having spoken, the French Catholics have acquiesced with a submission and a disinterestedness to which greatness cannot be denied. And there they are, standing between those two irreducible things, dogma and law.

The religious questions are once more paralyzing the republican government in its onward course towards social reforms. Clémenceau claims the qualification of socialist, granted to him by Viviani but refused by Jaurès. It is true that he adds to it the qualification of *radical*, which might be a diminutive. All that is a question of words and definitions.

If the Catholic Church ever happens to fail us, another one is ready to supply its place, that of *Collectivisme unifié*. As it possesses its pontiffs, so it has its dogma, out of which there is no salvation: the abolition of individual property replaced by collective property; the universal salary under the authority of the State, sole employer, master of all salaries, distributor of work, only ruler of pleasure and rest.

The Eden dreamt of by Karl Marx has a sort of likeness to a bagnio which has no attraction whatever for the radical socialists. Far from wishing the suppression of individual property which he looks upon "as being the primordial condition of individual development and human progress," Clémenceau endeavors to universalize it or at least to make it more accessible to every one. He is in favor of old workers' pensions, of a more equitable regulation of work, of a greater freedom for the discussion of salaries, of a fiscal legislation which would aim at wealth and spare poverty and leave no immunity for any kind of income. In all his writings, in all his speeches, may be felt a deep and sincere pity for human misery.

There is not any doubt that no change in social order can be effected without the *wishing-to-be-better* people disturbing the well-to-do ones. But is not the danger threatening wealth to be found oftener in itself,—in its own selfishness? And is it not another way of defending it than to exact from it the sacrifices necessary to allay the revolts of suffering and hunger? By hesitating before the injustice that a new repartition of wealth might bring on, the *bourgeois* socialism of M. Clémenceau shows that it is ready to sacrifice something. But will this sacrifice prove sufficient?

Not only has a statesman to work out the problem of the intercourse of citizens either with one another or with the national collectivity; his gaze must go beyond the frontier; to insure the existence and freedom of individuals is only half his task; he must

at the same time secure the existence and independence of his country. What will be the foreign policy of Clémenceau?

He has intrusted the care of it to M. Stephen Pichon, former contributor to "*La Justice*," who after having distinguished himself both in the press and the tribune, had represented France in foreign lands long enough to be able to be considered as a professional diplomatist.

But the very choice he made of his helpmate of "*La Justice*" reveals that Clémenceau firmly intends to keep the upper hand over our foreign affairs, and a few pessimists have wondered whether this choice and that of General Picquart, which seems to put the War Department also into the hands of the Prime Minister, might not betoken secret designs alarming for the friends of peace.

Clémenceau, who prides himself upon belonging to the tradition of the French revolution, does not forget that, in the time of the *Jacobins*, *patriot* and *republican* were synonymous words. Assuming the responsibilities of government, his duty is to consider even to the most unlikely contingencies, and if he did not prepare France for them, he would be treacherous to her. The future indeed is not so safe that our statesmen's watchfulness may be lulled to sleep.

However, by the human tendencies of his mind, by the engagements of his past, by the necessities of his reform policy, Clémenceau is a resolute partisan of peace; it is useless to add: of peace with dignity. Never since her reverses has France felt her army to be stronger or in better condition. Never has her intercourse with the powers given her greater security. Our alliance with Russia maintained, the "*entente cordiale*" with England, a friendly reconciliation with Italy; good and fair relations with all powers, such is and remains the basis of our foreign policy. But whatever security, on account of its army and alliances, may French democracy feel, it is, above all, peaceful and industrious; nobody would succeed in involving it in an adventurous course; if among the difficulties of the present hour, its confidence has been given to Clémenceau, the reason of it is that Clémenceau is expected to lead to success, through peace with all nations, a policy of reforms and social advancement.

L. ANDRIEUX.